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*London Fires in 1850.**

"The statistics of London fires are by no means devoid of interest, and the time may come when they will form an index to the social advancement of the people; for in proportion as houses are built more and more fire-proof, and habits of carefulness become more and more diffused, the number of destructive fires will assuredly lessen."—*Knight's London.*

THE number of fires in the Metropolis, at which the firemen attended, was in 1850 only 868; of these 267 were extinguished by the prompt exertions of the inmates, 389 were extinguished by the inmates with casual voluntary aid; while the suppression of 212 devolved upon the firemen. The total number of calls given at the stations was 1,038, as shown by the following tabular statement:—

MONTHS.	Number of Fires.	Fatal Fires.	Lives Lost.	Chimneys on Fire.	False Alarms.
January	80	2	2	10	10
February	79	0	0	5	6
March	84	2	2	12	9
April	69	3	3	5	10
May	66	2	2	2	2
June	72	3	4	4	4
July	62	0	0	6	4
August	66	0	0	9	8
September	67	1	1	7	12
October	82	1	1	7	9
November	85	1	1	5	9
December	66	2	2	7	8
TOTAL	868	17	18	79	91

Instances in which insurances were known to have been effected upon the Building					
and Contents	..	..	..	..	381
Building only	..	..	..	..	141
Contents only	..	..	..	..	77
No Insurance	..	..	..	..	269
					868
Alarms from Chimneys on fire					
False alarms	..	..	..	..	79
					91
Making the total number of calls					1038

The number of fatal fires corresponds with that of the previous year, but the number of lives lost is very considerably less. These accidents may be classed as follows:—

* From the Report in the *Mechanics' Magazine*, May 17th, 1851, by Mr. W. Baddeley, C.E., Inventor of the Portable Canvas Cisterns; Improved Jet-spreaders; Farmer's Fire-engine; Every Man his own Fireman, &c. &c.

* One at Chiswick.

The following List shows the occupancy of that portion of the premises in which the fire originated; thereby illustrating the comparative liability to accident by fire of various trades, manufactories, and private dwellings:

Occupation.	Totally Destroyed.	Seriously Damaged.	Slightly Damaged.	Total.
Cabinet-makers	...	6	6	12
Cane-dyers	...	...	1	1
Carpenters, and workers in wood (not cabinet-makers)	1	15	16	32
Chandlers	1	6	11	18
Charcoal and coke, dealers in	...	1	1	2
Cheesemongers	...	1	3	4
Chemists, including laboratories	...	1	2	3
Chocolate-makers	...	...	1	1
Churches	1	1	3	5
Cigar-makers	...	...	1	1
Coal-merchants	...	1	2	3
Coach-makers	...	...	2	2
Coffee-roasters	...	...	2	2
Coffee-shops and chop-houses	...	1	4	5
Confectioners and pastry-cooks	...	...	5	5
Coopers	1	...	1	2
Cork-cutters	...	1	...	1
Corn-chandlers	...	2	...	2
Curriers and leather-dressers	2	1	2	5
Distillers	...	2	...	2
— illicit	...	1	1	2
Drapers, woollen and linen, and mercers	...	7	9	16
Druggists, wholesale	...	1	...	1
Dwellings, private	...	35	235	270
Dyers	...	...	2	2
Eating-houses	...	...	4	4
Emery-manufacturers	...	...	1	1
Engineers, mechanical	...	3	...	3
Farms	...	1	2	3
Feather merchants and dressers	...	1	...	1
Firework-makers	1	4	...	5
Fish-curer	...	1	...	1
Founders	...	2	1	3
Furriers and skin-dyers	...	1	2	3
Gas-works	...	1	...	1
Glass-blowers	...	...	1	1
Grocers and tea-dealers	...	4	2	6
Hat-makers	...	4	1	5
Horse-hair merchants	...	...	1	1
Hospitals	...	1	1	2
Hotels and club-houses	...	2	7	9
Lamp-black makers	...	1	1	2
Laundresses	...	...	1	1
Leather, patent japanned, manufacturers	...	2	...	2
Lime-wharf	...	1	...	1
Lodgings	...	11	78	89
Lucifer-match makers	...	3	...	3
Manchester warehousemen	...	...	5	5
Marine-stores, dealers in	...	1	1	2
Mast and block makers	...	1	...	1
Mattress-makers	...	1	...	1
Milliners and dress-makers	...	1	3	4
Musical-instrument makers	...	1	1	2
Nurserymen	...	...	1	1
Oil and colour men (not candle-makers)	1	5	5	11

Occupation.	Totally Destroyed.	Seriously Damaged.	Slightly Damaged.	Total.
Painters, plumbers, and glaziers	...	2	1	3
Painted-baize makers	...	1	...	1
Paper-stainers	...	3	3	6
Parchment-makers	...	1	...	1
Pasteboard-makers	...	1	...	1
Pawnbrokers	...	...	1	1
Printers and engravers	...	3	6	9
Printers, copperplate	...	1	...	1
—, muslin	...	1	1	2
Printer's-ink maker	...	1	...	1
Public buildings	...	...	1	1
— exhibition (not theatre)	...	...	1	1
Rag-merchants	...	1	2	3
Railways	...	...	2	2
Rope-makers	...	...	1	1
Sack-makers	...	...	1	1
Sale shops and offices	1	11	23	35
Saw-mills	1	3	4	8
Schools, charity	...	...	2	2
Ships	...	4	1	5
—, steam	...	...	2	2
Ship-builders	...	1	2	3
— chandlers	...	1	...	1
Silk-dressers	...	...	1	1
Stables	...	6	5	11
Starch-makers	...	1	...	1
Straw-bonnet makers	...	1	1	2
Soda-water and ginger-beer makers	...	2	...	2
Soot-merchants	...	...	2	2
Sugar-refiners	...	1	...	1
Tailors	...	3	3	6
Tallow chandlers, melters, and soap-boilers	...	2	3	5
Tarpaulin-makers	...	...	2	2
Theatres	...	...	4	4
Tinmen, braziers, and smiths	...	...	7	7
Timber-merchants	...	...	1	1
Tobacco-manufacturers	...	1	...	1
Tobacconists	...	1	5	6
Toy-warehouses	...	...	2	2
Under repair, or building	...	1	3	4
Unoccupied	...	...	1	1
Upholsterers	...	3	3	6
Varnish-makers	...	...	2	2
Victuallers, licensed	1	4	22	27
Wadding-makers	...	...	2	2
Warehouses	...	...	1	1
Water-works	...	1	...	1
Weavers	...	1	...	1
—, willow	...	...	3	3
Wharfingers	...	1	...	1
Wine and spirit merchants	1	1	6	8
Wine-coopers	...	1	...	1
Wool-staplers	...	...	1	1
Workhouses	...	...	1	1
TOTAL	18	229	621	868

The Causes of Fire have during the past year been of the usual character; and, so far as could be satisfactorily ascertained, may be stated as follows:—

Accidents unforeseen and for the } most part unavoidable ..	7	Kiln, overheated	1
Apparel ignited on the person ..	11	Lamps, oil	10
Candles, various accidents with ..	113	—, naptha	8
—, ignited bed-curtains ..	77	Lightning	2
— window-curtains ..	57	Lime, slacking	2
Carelessness, instances of palpable ..	19	Linen, &c., airing or drying before fire	35
Charcoal fires	2	Lucifer-matches, making ..	1
— used suicidally	1	—, using	4
Children playing with fire	7	—, ignited by cat	1
— lucifer-matches	6	Naptha, upset and ignited ..	1
Chloroform, manufacturing	1	Ovens, defective or overheated ..	6
Cinders put away unextinguished ..	17	Oil, boiling	2
Coke	1	Pitch and tar, boiling	5
Coffee-roasting	1	Reading in bed	4
Coppers improperly set	3	Sewing in bed	1
Fire sparks	54	Smoking in bed	1
Fires kindled on hearths and other } improper places	6	— meat	5
Fireworks, making	3	Shavings, loose, ignited	44
—, letting off	4	Spontaneous ignition of coals ..	1
Flues, foul and ignited	31	— lampblack	4
—, blocked up	10	— greasy rubbish	1
—, defective and overheated	47	Spontaneous ignition of phosphorus ..	1
—, in next house	5	— railway signal lights ..	2
Friction of machinery	1	— shoddy	1
Fumigation, incautious	5	Stills, illicit	2
Furnaces and boilers, heat from ..	19	Stoves, defective and overheated ..	11
Fusees exploded by falling	1	—, improperly set	6
— by sun's heat	2	—, drying	9
Gas, escape of, from defective fittings	37	—, pipe	14
— from street mains	2	—, ironing	1
—, lighting of	5	Tallow-melting	1
—, left burning too high	13	Tobacco-smoking	23
—, fittings, repairing or altering of	4	Varnish-boiling	2
—, cooking stove	1	Suspicious	7
Gunpowder, explosion of	2	Wilful	17
Hearths, defective	2	Unknown	46
Intoxication	9	Total	868

During the year 1850, numerous extensive conflagrations have occurred in various parts of England, by which the seats of several noblemen and gentlemen have been destroyed, as well as valuable manufactories and extensive farms laid in ashes. Among the last year's provincial fires, that which broke out at Gravesend a little before two o'clock in the morning of Sunday, August 11th, stands conspicuous. The flames commenced in a double house in High Street, and though discovered early, made such rapid progress that the tardy efforts made to suppress it were wholly inefficient, and by three o'clock the light of the fire was visible in all parts of the metropolis. Many of the London engines proceeded some distance eastward in search of the conflagration, but being unable to ascertain its whereabouts, they returned to their respective stations. At

half-past six o'clock a message by the electric telegraph announced the fire to be at Gravesend, that a large number of houses were already destroyed, and the town in imminent danger. Firemen and engines were immediately dispatched per railway. On reaching Gravesend the firemen found a great part of the High Street in flames, and their utmost exertions needed to prevent the extension of the fire. Engines from Tilbury Fort, with those belonging to the town, the Customs, the Kent and Sun Fire Offices, together with those from London, were brought to bear upon the parts where the danger was most threatening; and by mid-day the fire had done its worst, twenty-seven buildings having been burned down, and many more seriously damaged. When this town was the scene of former conflagrations, no recompense was awarded to a number of deserving hard-working men, who were for several hours engaged in assisting to extinguish the fire; the consequence was, that at the commencement of the present conflagration, while it was quite within the means of the little Fire Establishment of this pitiful place, no assistance was obtainable, and the fire for some time raged uncontrolled,—Gravesend reaping a fearful harvest of *pound foolishness* for the *penny wisdom* they had previously sown.

The subject of fire extinction has of late attracted a good deal of attention, having been considered by the Government as part and parcel of an extensive system of sanatory reform. The evidence collected by the Board of Health with reference to improvements in the water supply of the metropolis for sanatory purposes, as well as for extinguishing fire, has been published; and it is probable that some practical measure for this object will be shortly brought before Parliament. It is pretty generally admitted that, to a "continuous water supply under considerable pressure," we must come at last; the experience acquired in the numerous places where this system has been adopted, being quite conclusive as to its efficiency. In the "Report of the General Board of Health on the Supply of Water to the Metropolis," the Commissioners observe, that "the inadequacy of the supplies of water under the intermittent system occasions great danger to life and property; but that, by arrangements which are practicable, under a system of constant supply at high pressure, the whole force of the water in the mains may be brought to bear at any point for extinguishing fires in from one to five minutes, or in about one-fourth the time that it takes the best appointed fire-engines now to gain the spot and be in action after the alarm of fire has been given. That, judging from the experience of various places where improved arrangements have been put in

practice, it appears that by the general adoption of these arrangements, more than two-thirds of the fires which now occur in the metropolis may be extinguished before any extensive damage takes place. That the crime of incendiarism may be checked ; and that these consequences alone, were there no other advantages to be obtained, would render it worth while to make the change from the intermittent to the constant system."

THE ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF LIFE FROM FIRE, through the instrumentality of their conductors and fire-escapes, have been the means of saving *thirty* lives during the past year, as already stated. This fact shows, in a most striking manner, the necessity that exists for an efficient fire-escape provision throughout London, *without any intervening unprotected districts*. It is much to be regretted, both on account of the injury done to the Society and the satisfaction thus withheld from its subscribers, that the preservation of lives by the Society's fire-escapes are so seldom noticed by the public press. Only let a life be *lost*, and to-day we read a harrowing narrative of the catastrophe, to be again repeated on the morrow in reporting the "Coroner's Inquest." But if a life is *saved*, it rarely obtains a passing notice !

Thus perhaps but few persons, comparatively speaking, beyond the immediate vicinity in which the fires have occurred, have any idea of the extent of public service occasionally rendered by the Society ; few, for example, are aware, that only the last week in April three fires occurred in the course of five nights, at which no less than fifteen persons were rescued by means of the fire-escapes of the respective districts, viz.,—

At the fire at 210, Shoreditch, Saturday morning, April 27, when the Bishopgate Street fire-escape conductor rescued eight persons, viz., Thomas Delapr , his wife, and four children ; James Hall, and George Brand. At the fire at the Fountain Inn, Foster Lane, Sunday morning, April 28, when the Newgate Street fire-escape conductor rescued three persons, viz., William Sutton, Frederick Sutton, and Mary Sutton. And at the fire at 5, High Street, St. Giles's, Tuesday morning, April 30, when the Hart Street fire-escape conductor rescued four persons from the roof, viz., Mr. Butler, his wife, son, and daughter.

It is only necessary to add, that each of them *occurred within the hours of two and five, A.M.*, that the persons rescued were all as aroused from their beds, scarcely having time to put on an additional garment, and that the liveliest gratitude has been expressed for the service the Society has been instrumental in rendering them.